

Going Digital in the Area Studies World: Pipedream or Necessity?

Indiana's "Collaboration, Advocacy and Recruitment: Area and International Studies Librarianship Workshop" stood strongly on its own and also resonated with several previous conferences and events, among them the "Global Dimensions of Scholarship and Research Libraries" forum held late in 2012 at Duke University. The "Global Forum" generated three broad recommendations for international information resources and services: an aggressive emphasis on digital resources; the radical adoption of international/global perspectives and capabilities across all library programs, systems, and tools; and a worldwide approach to cooperation that encompasses international as well as domestic partners.

Many follow-up conversations with area studies specialists have snagged on the Global Forum's call for a deliberate digital turn. One recurrent theme concerns who most appropriately speaks for scholars in the international arena. Are the information needs of researchers who focus on emergent "global" agendas really that different from those who are grounded in mainstream "area studies"? How do different resource types and presentation formats affect scholarly and collections agendas? Are we captives of the marketplace? If so, who can or should challenge its terms?

At a more practical level, area studies specialists often (and aptly) call attention to the globally uneven realities of scholarly communication and information exchange. As one Indiana respondent exclaims, "E-BOOKS ARE NOT YET THERE!" Publishing in many countries remains embedded in the print world. Until digital infrastructures and markets are more reliable and robust, local expression will continue to favor the analog media that people actually use. Moreover, many area studies scholars do just fine with the same kinds of materials that they've consulted in the past. To the extent that metropolitan countries already hold an edge in terms of digital capabilities, finally, our eagerness for electronic resources may inadvertently reinforce inequitable relationships of knowledge and power. Insisting on a digital perspective may thus be both ethically and operationally premature. Pursuing digital resources is a will-o-the-wisp exercise that can only detract from the painstaking, on-the-ground efforts that continue to mark our success.

The Global Forum's recommendations concerning digital resources are nonetheless compelling. Today's students, and many scholars as well, are embedded in an electronic environment in which analog sources are ever less visible or appreciated. This reality shapes the viability of the area studies project as a whole. The rise of "global" research agendas, typically based in cross-cutting themes like the environment, trade, or public health, has then intensified the demand for (usually digital) numeric and geospatial data, government information, and public policy materials. The pace may be

uneven, but electronic resources and infrastructures are expanding throughout the globe. Collections that are limited to print serve no one well.

Even those who insist on the primacy of print expect things to change. As technology improves and the marketplace matures, we will also benefit from more readily available expertise, infrastructures, and (perhaps) funds with which to identify, provide access to, and ensure reliable preservation of digital objects. Simply waiting for the interplay of supply and demand to resolve these challenges, however, seems a risky strategy. Those who have proven most adept in creating and then exploiting new information markets are the commercial firms that too often also seek monopoly control. Matters of substance, timeliness, usability, access, and cost are then defined by these external agents. We can do better.

The call for area and international studies librarians to "go digital," however, is daunting. A continuing bias toward print is part of the mix, as are our still limited capabilities to manage digital resources. Even more, this monolithic mandate is simply too big to digest – we need a more nuanced agenda. Two examples, among a host of possibilities, may hint at our options:

1. The Latin American Research Resources Project, associated with the Center for Research Libraries' Global Resources Network, successfully partnered with several Latin American NGOs and think tanks to digitize their publications and make them broadly available on the Internet. Materials like working papers from Peru's Instituto de Estudios Peruanos [Peruvian Studies Institute] are therefore readily accessible to students and scholars everywhere, reinforcing the Institute's goal of disseminating its research as widely as possible (see: <http://www.crl.edu/grn/larrp>).
2. Richard Poynder has posted several interviews concerning the current state of Open Access on his blog. An October, 2013 conversation with Michelle Willmers of South Africa's University of Cape Town includes the following summary:

"A former journal publishing manager, Michelle Willmers was drawn to the Open Access movement after witnessing international publishers sweep into South Africa and acquire local journals. They then locked these journals behind paywalls and sought to sell them to local academic institutions at prices most simply could not afford.

"For the South African academic community this was a case of bad to worse: Historically South African research has not been published over much in international journals. As such, it has tended to be invisible to the global research community. Now it was in danger of becoming invisible to local researchers as well.

...

"It was this same broken local context that led to the creation (in 1997) of the South Africa-based service African Journals Online (AJOL)... A local web portal

that enables African journals to make their content available online (and so visible on a global basis without the need to cede ownership to international publishers), AJOL currently hosts content from 462 African journals, 150 of which are OA." (see: <http://poynder.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/michelle-willmers-on-state-of-open.html>).

The following paragraphs delve deeper into one component of a broader strategy to pursue the Global Forum's digital agenda.

Our examples from Latin America and Africa suggest that targeted efforts may help us to move beyond existing patterns for the production and use of international information. One starting point is to categorize specific information resources and segments in terms of their purposes and characteristics. This understanding may then make it easier for us, along with our colleagues throughout the world, to shape the digital marketplace rather than simply waiting as others take the lead. Coordinated, equitable approaches to digitization or hosting, for example, may appeal to organizations that strive to share their research, message, or recommendations as widely as possible. Revenue-driven trade publishers, while improbable digitization partners, might nonetheless entertain consortial or national site licenses to broaden their exposure in areas where sales are likely to be low.

The following five sets of characteristics and criteria may thus allow area and international studies librarians to more clearly identify the combinations of players, motivations, and contextual elements that can facilitate or hinder cooperative digitization initiatives. Together, these factors may therefore suggest where interventions to secure broad digital access might have good chances for success – or not. The categories themselves are at this point provisional and schematic, with lots of overlap. Short glosses of how the main bullet points might be interpreted are offered only for the first general category ("Purposes and goals..."), though similar explanatory prompts could be applied throughout.

1. Purposes and goals in disseminating information. What motivates individuals or organizations to broadcast their thoughts and achievements? What kinds of partnerships might particularly resonate with these varied objectives?
 - *Monetary considerations:* Higher financial stakes reduce the likelihood of open-handed partnerships, though arrangements to increase exposure in unpromising markets may still be attractive.
 - Profit or surplus – sometimes to support other organizational priorities, sometimes for its own sake
 - Self-sufficiency or sustainability – the organization seeks only to cover its costs
 - None – revenue is not a consideration
 - *Scholarly purposes:* Non-economic publishing goals may lower barriers to collaboration.

- Recognition – among peers, among the general public. (This may involve publications in high-profile outlets.)
 - Academic reward – e.g. tenure, promotion, special appointments
 - Financial returns - e.g. book contracts, royalties, textbook adoption and sales
 - Strengthening the record of evidence and/or the corpus of data needed to explore some topic or theme. (This can include user-created collections, crowd-sourced resources, etc.)
 - None – most publications lack any immediate scholarly purpose
 - *Social impact*: Voluntary information-sharing initiatives may welcome opportunities to reach larger audiences.
 - Mobilize or maintain groups, causes, or actions
 - Publicize products, purposes, positions, etc.
 - Promote the memory or memorialization of individuals, places, events, processes, etc.
 - Disseminate factual information and public announcements
 - Satisfy reporting mandates for corporate or governmental transparency
 - Entertainment or pleasure
 - None
 - *Other purposes*: These diverse motivations may require individualized approaches to achieve successful partnerships.
 - Self-expression
 - Participation in a community defined entirely or in part by its publications, whose intended audience may be limited to insiders
 - Aggregated manifestations of individual expression, e.g. social media
2. Legal conditions and constraints; contracts and copyright. Under what circumstances can librarians and scholars engage in digitization or capture digital resources in order to broaden access? How do these possibilities vary across countries, formats, and categories of users? When can librarians pursue contractual arrangements to expand their activities?
- The distinct legal realms of copyright and of contracts
 - The public domain
 - Legal provisions concerning library and scholarly uses of copyrighted materials; Fair Use and its limits
 - "Transformative uses" of copyrighted materials, including emergent understandings around "consumptive" and "non-consumptive" research—whether the explicit content of each source forms the basis for analysis, or research builds from machine-based analyses across aggregations of text and other content
 - Classroom and teaching uses, including reserves, course packs, etc.
 - Interlibrary loan, remote access, resource sharing

- Other legal allowances
 - Preservation reformatting
 - Reformatted versions for the visually impaired (etc.)
 - Additional considerations and complications
 - Mixed audiences and uses, e.g. streaming music or video that supports scholarship but also entertainment
 - Mixed legal environments:
 - Different laws in domestic and foreign jurisdictions
 - Materials that combine text, images, video (etc.), in which separate formats carry their own legal requirements
 - Continuing change - laws are in flux and court rulings can be inconsistent
3. The scale of publications and packages; the impact of platforms and added-value features. The scale and complexity of information resources affect scholarly uses, technological requirements for robust digital access, and marketplace values and claims. Broadly speaking, proposals to expand access to aggregated content that is bolstered by added-value tools will be limited by sponsors' proprietary expectations and "versioning" strategies.
- Digital resources
 - Discrete, self-contained objects, e.g. most single e-books
 - Complex objects with blurry boundaries in terms of time (e.g. dynamic news sources, blogs, sites that combine information feeds) or content (multiple formats, embedded links, etc.), that may require many separate negotiations and permissions
 - Aggregated, disaggregated, and/or recombinant content, e.g. journals, journal articles, and article databases
 - Content whose utility may be bolstered by proprietary platforms and tools that complement and enhance the content itself
 - Analog resources
 - Simple objects, e.g. books, journals, images, etc.
 - Aggregated content, e.g. microform sets

Source categories from the library's perspective. Libraries, acting on behalf of researchers, students, and teachers, deploy different kinds of information resources for distinct purposes. The local importance of each category will reflect specific programmatic and budget priorities.

- The role of information resources within the academic community
 - Record of scholarship – Research results and scholarly texts that reflect and advance inquiry
 - Trade publications – Materials intended for a broad consumer marketplace

- Primary sources and distinctive materials, including ephemera – Materials typically generated for non-permanent, non-scholarly uses, that may then be re-purposed to support research
 - Data – In numeric and other forms
 - Format categories, each of which poses distinct challenges in terms of metadata, legal regimes, and best practices for digital capture, long-term storage, and delivery or presentation
 - Text
 - Images
 - Audio
 - Moving images
 - Other media
 - Data
 - Combinations (e.g. texts with embedded images or video)
4. Contexts for conversations and negotiations: Actors and business models. Some digital initiatives can be pursued through direct conversations with information creators, though many are instead conditioned by pre-existing (often pre-emptive) arrangements between creators and intermediaries. Libraries and other actors that wish to explore partnerships likewise range widely in terms of their size, nature, and geographic distribution. Different business models and contractual terms also affect the possibilities.
- Key actors: creators and their agents
 - Information creators – individuals, groups, institutions
 - Publishers
 - Agents and aggregators
 - Key actors: consumers and their agents
 - Individual libraries or similar organizations
 - National or regional agencies (e.g. national councils for science and technology)
 - National or international library consortia and alliances
 - Consumer consortia
 - Partnerships that combine creators, consumers, and agents, in any number of ways
 - Business models, e.g.
 - Subscriptions/ "Toll Access" – encompassing both for-profit and non-profit entities
 - Open Access – encompassing both for-profit and non-profit entities
 - Non-exclusive access arrangements that may allow a variety of approaches and proposals
 - Highly versioned packages of content and add-on capabilities, sometimes available across multiple platforms or sites
 - Partnerships

- Direct engagement with or by "end users"
- Middleman pass-through arrangements, e.g. serials agents that may offer discounts or special services due to their bulk purchases and economies of scale
- Aggregator-sponsored value-added platforms and capabilities, some of which entail add-on costs
- Community-based initiatives and packages, e.g. SCOAP3

These elements suggest a checklist or matrix of features that may allow bibliographers, and others, to organize their assessments of specific digital acquisitions and digitization projects. Significant progress may also require partnerships or alliances whose range is broad enough to warrant a separate typology and matrix. The technical and legal complexities associated with electronic resources comprise a third realm for review. There's plenty of opportunity, and plenty to do!